



South Carolina DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Hugh E. Weathers, Commissioner

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SCDA, Partners Announce Statewide Mobile Irrigation Laboratory Pilot Project

FLORENCE, SC —The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), in a partnership with the South Carolina Department of Agriculture (SCDA) and Aiken Soil and Water Conservation District, announced the launch of a three-year Mobile Irrigation Laboratory (MIL) statewide pilot project on Jan. 15 at the 2020 SC Agribiz & Farm Expo in Florence, South Carolina.

The Mobile Irrigation Lab is a locally led water conservation project involving multiple partners across all levels of governmental and private entities.

The Aiken Soil and Water Conservation District is leading the initiative through fostering funding partners and serving as the project manager. The MIL pilot project will provide water and energy audits on 24 agricultural center pivot irrigation systems throughout the state of South Carolina at no charge to the agricultural producer.

The goal of this project is to determine the feasibility of a statewide MIL program that can be implemented throughout South Carolina to agricultural producers at no cost.

"We were approached by a local farmer who brought the idea of establishing a Mobile Irrigation Laboratory in the state of South Carolina," said Yvonne Kling, Chair of the Aiken Soil and Water Conservation District. "We felt that as a Soil and Water Conservation District, we had to make the effort to establish this MIL pilot project. We also wanted to ensure that this came at no cost to agricultural producers who were willing to participate. As a Soil and Water Conservation District and agricultural community, we believe this is a proactive conservation opportunity that we cannot afford to miss."

The Aiken Soil and Water Conservation District secured primary funding through a federal agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). While the NRCS was willing to provide significant funding, matching funds were still needed to fully fund this project. The SCDA and SCDNR stepped in to assist with state funding, along with contributions from the Palmetto AgriBusiness Council (PABC), AgSouth Farm Credit and American Forest Management (AFM). Clemson Cooperative Extension will also be assisting with this project and conducting parallel studies on selected agricultural center pivots.

"By improving the efficiency of their center pivot irrigation systems, South Carolina farmers can save water, power and money — helping them feed, fuel and clothe more people while preserving our natural resources," said Commissioner of Agriculture Hugh Weathers. "We're excited to collaborate on this pilot project."



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"I applaud the Aiken Soil and Water Conservation District for their leadership in establishing this critical MIL pilot project," said Ken Rentiers, Deputy Director for SCDNR's Land, Water and Conservation Division. "We are excited to be a part of this project as it promotes the wise use of soil and water in South Carolina which SCDNR is charged with ensuring each Soil and Water Conservation District is fulfilling. This will also provide critical data related to agricultural water use as we continue our statewide water planning efforts."

"We are extremely thankful for all of our funding contributors, but especially from our federal partner, NRCS and our state partners, SCDA and SCDNR," said Kling. "Also, to have the support of PABC, AFM and AgSouth Farm Credit, that speaks volumes to the need of the MIL pilot project. We are also appreciative to have Clemson Cooperative Extension participating in this pilot study. Our hope is that all of these efforts will help in establishing a statewide MIL for our agricultural producers."

The Aiken Soil and Water Conservation District will be accepting an initial round of applications from agricultural producers with center pivots through Feb. 15, 2020.

If a producer is not selected to be a part of the pilot project this year, that producer will be eligible for consideration for the following two years of the project. Application and information on selection criteria is available at www.aikensoilandwater.com, and applications can be emailed to MILpilot.sc@gmail.com

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